CLAIMS

We claim:

1.   An object or information management method
comprising:

a storing step for storing an object of two-
dimensional or three-dimensional shape received from a
customer;

a first storing step for storing in a storage
device a first identifier for identifying said customer and a
second identifier for identifying said object by associating
said first and second identifiers with said object;

an accepting step for accepting a request from said
customer requesting retrieval of said object, said request
containing therein said first identifier and said second
identifier;

a step for comparing said first identifier
contained in said request with said first identifier stored
in said storage device, and for rejecting said request if
said two first identifiers are not substantially the same;

a searching step for searching for said object
based at least on said second identifier;

a converting step for converting information
contained in said object into first information which is
analog data or digital data; and

a sending step for sending said first information
to said customer.

2.   An object or information management method
comprising:

a storing step for storing an object of two-

dimensional or three-dimensional shape received from a customer, or for storing second information received from a customer in a storage device, said second information being analog data or digital data;

a first storing step for storing in a storage device a first identifier for identifying said customer and a second identifier for identifying said object or said second information;

an accepting step for accepting a request from said customer requesting retrieval of said object or said second information, said request containing therein said first identifier and said second identifier;

a step for comparing said first identifier contained in said request with said first identifier stored in said storage device, and for rejecting said request if said two first identifiers are not substantially the same;

a searching step for searching for said object or said second information based at least on said second identifier;

a converting step for converting information contained in said object into first information which is analog data or digital data, said converting step being performed when said customer is requesting the retrieval of said object; and

a sending step for sending said first information or said second information to said customer.

3. An object or information management method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of presenting said customer with an image display of a storage list showing both said stored object and said stored second information.

4. An object or information management method according to claim 1, wherein said accepting in said accepting step and said sending in said sending step are each performed by transmitting a digital data sequence over a communication line.

5. An object or information management method according to claim 4, wherein said digital data sequence is encrypted.

6. An information management method according to claim 1, wherein

said first information includes therein at least one of visual indications of customer name, customer identifier, attribute information of said object, identifier of said object, or an optical identifier having information consisting of at least one of said first and second identifiers, or

said second information includes therein at least one of visual indications of customer name, customer identifier, attribute information of said second information, identifier of said second information, or an optical identifier having information consisting of at least one of said first and second identifiers.

7. An information management method according to claim 1, further including:

a step for counting the number of times that said customer retrieves said object, said first information, or said second information; and

a step for billing said customer for charges

including a charge corresponding to said number of times.

8.   An information management method according to claim 1, wherein

when the information contained in said object is converted into said first information, said method further includes:

a second storing step for storing said first information in a storage device; and

a step for storing third information in a storage device by associating said third information with said object, said third information providing an indication of whether said first information into which the information contained in said object has been converted is stored or not, and wherein:

said searching step searches for said first information when said third information associated with said object to be searched for indicates that said first information is stored, and

when said first information is stored, said sending step reads out said stored first information and sends said readout first information.

9.   An information management method according to claim 1, wherein

when the information contained in said object is converted into said first information, said method further includes a second storing step for storing said first information in a storage device, and wherein:

said searching step first searches for said first information and, if said first information is not found, then searches for said object, and

when said first information is stored, said sending step reads out said stored first information and sends said readout first information.

10. An information management method according to claim 1, wherein

when said object is already received from said customer, said accepting step allows said customer to select and specify whether said sending step should send said object or said first information,

when said customer specifies that said object be sent, said sending step sends said object to said customer,

when said customer specifies that said first information be sent, said sending step sends said first information to said customer, and

when said customer requests that said sending step send said object only, said converting step is not performed.

11. An information management method according to claim 1, further including:

a step for accepting a request from said customer for return of said object;

a step for returning said object to said customer;

a step for searching for said first information corresponding to said object; and

a step for erasing said first information if said first information is stored.

12. An information management method comprising:

a first storing step for storing second information received from a customer, said second information being analog data or digital data, a first identifier for

identifying said customer, and a second identifier for identifying said second information, at an address having first location information in a first place;

a transmitting step for transmitting information including said first identifier, said second identifier, and said first location information, to a management section;

a first responding step for outputting said second information from a storage device located in said first place, if a request containing therein said first identifier and said second identifier and requesting retrieval of said second information is made by said customer;

a step for said management section to issue an instruction to transfer said second information from said first place to a second place when the period of storage in said first place has exceeded a predetermined period, or when the amount of information stored in said storage device in said first place has exceeded a predetermined amount, or when said customer requests said transfer;

a second storing step for storing said second information at an address having second location information in said second place;

a step for said management section to store therein said second location information by associating said second location information with said first identifier and said second identifier; and

a sending step for searching for said second information in accordance with an instruction from said management section, and sending said second information to said customer via a communication line, if a request containing therein said first identifier and said second identifier and requesting retrieval of said second information is received from said customer.

13. An information management method comprising:

a first depositing step for depositing an object received from a customer, or a medium received from said customer and having recorded thereon second information which is analog data or digital data, at an address having first location information in a first place;

a first storing step for transmitting information including a first identifier for identifying said customer, a second identifier for identifying said object or said medium, and said first location information, to a management section, and for storing said information in said management section;

an instructing step for said management section to issue an instruction to transfer said object or said medium from said first place to a second place when the period of deposit in said first place has exceeded a predetermined period, or when said object or said mediumstored in said storage device in said first place has exceeded a predetermined quantity, or when said customer requests said transfer;

a second depositing step for transferring said object or said medium from said first place to said second place, and for depositing said object or said medium at an address having second location information in said second place;

a second storing step for said management section to store therein said second location information by associating said second location information with said first identifier and said second identifier; and

a sending step for searching for said object or said medium in accordance with an instruction from said management section, and sending first information, which is analog data or digital data obtained by converting

information contained in said object, or said second
information reproduced from said medium, to said customer via
a communication line, if a request containing therein said
first identifier and said second
identifier and requesting retrieval of said object or said
second information is received from said customer.

14. An information management method according to
claim 12, wherein said management section includes a first
computer comprising a communication device installed in said
first place, and a second computer comprising a communication
device installed in said second place.

15. An information management method according to
claim 14, wherein said second computer has a first data space
not accessible by said customer and a second data space
accessible by said customer, and wherein said method further
includes the step of allowing said customer to access data
stored in said second data space via the Internet after said
first identifier has been identified.

16. An object or information management method
comprising:
a storing step for storing an object of two-
dimensional or three-dimensional shape received from a
customer;
a first storing step for storing in a storage
device a first identifier for identifying said customer and a
second identifier for identifying said object;
an accepting step for accepting a request from said
customer requesting analysis of said object, said request
containing therein said first identifier and said second

identifier;

a step for comparing said first identifier contained
in said request with said first identifier stored in said
storage device, and for rejecting said request if said two
first identifiers are not substantially the same;

a searching step for searching for said object
based at least on said second identifier;

a converting step for converting information
contained in said object into first information which is
analog data or digital data;

a first sending step for sending said first
information to an analyzing person;

a receiving step for receiving an analysis result
transmitted from said analyzing person; and

a second sending step for sending said analysis
result to said customer.

17. An object or information management method
comprising:

a storing step for storing an object of two-
dimensional or three-dimensional shape received from a
customer, or for storing second information received from a
customer in a storage device, said second information being
analog data or digital data;

a first storing step for storing in a storage
device a first identifier for identifying said customer and a
second identifier for identifying said object or said second
information;

an accepting step for accepting a request from said
customer requesting analysis of said object or said second
information, said request containing therein said first

identifier and said second identifier;

a step for comparing said first identifier contained in said request with said first identifier stored in said storage device, and for rejecting said request if said two first identifiers are not substantially the same;

a searching step for searching for said object or said second information based at least on said second identifier;

a converting step for converting information contained in said object into first information which is analog data or digital data, said converting step being performed when said customer is requesting the analysis of said object;

a first sending step for sending said first information or said second information to an analyzing person;

a receiving step for receiving an analysis result transmitted from said analyzing person; and

a second sending step for sending said analysis result to said customer.

18. An object or information management method according to claim 16, further comprising:

a step for presenting a plurality of analyzing persons to said customer; and

a step for having said customer select at least one analyzing person from among said plurality of analyzing persons, and wherein:

said first information or said second information is sent to said selected analyzing person.

19. An object or information management method

according to claim 16, wherein said method includes, instead of said receiving step and said second sending step, a third sending step for said analyzing person to send said analysis result directly to said customer.

20. An object or information management method according to claim 16, wherein said accepting in said accepting step, said sending in said first sending step, said second sending step, and said third sending step, and said receiving in said receiving step are each performed via a communication line.

21. An object or information management method according to claim 16, wherein

when the customer that sent said object or said second information is denoted as a first customer

said object, said first information, or said second information is an object or information concerning a second customer, and said analysis is carried out at the request of at least either one of said first and second customers.

22. An object or information management method according to claim 16, further comprising:

a step for paying an analysis fee to said analyzing person; and

a step for charging said analysis fee to said customer.

23. An object or information management method comprising:

a storing step for storing an object of two-dimensional or three-dimensional shape received from a first

customer;

a first storing step for storing in a storage
device a first customer identifier for identifying said first
customer and a deposit identifier for identifying said
object;

an accepting step for accepting an instruction
containing therein said first customer identifier, said
deposit identifier, and a second customer identifier for
identifying a customer other than said first customer, said
instruction instructing to grant a request for retrieval of
said object if said request is received together with said
second customer identifier and said deposit identifier;

a step for comparing said first customer identifier
contained in said instruction with said first identifier
stored in said storage device, and for rejecting said
instruction if said two first customer identifiers are not
substantially the same;

an accepting step for accepting said object
retrieval request containing therein said second customer
identifier and said deposit identifier; and

a step for permitting the retrieval of said object
in accordance with said request if said second customer
identifier contained in said request substantially matches
said second customer identifier contained in said
instruction.

24. An object or information management method
comprising:

a storing step for storing an object of two-
dimensional or three-dimensional shape received from a first
customer, or for storing second information received from a
first customer in a storage device, said second information

being analog data or digital data;

a first storing step for storing in a storage device a first customer identifier for identifying said first customer and a deposit identifier for identifying said object or said second information;

an accepting step for accepting an instruction containing therein said first customer identifier, said deposit identifier, and a second customer identifier for identifying a customer other than said first customer, said instruction instructing to grant a request for retrieval of said object or said second information if said request is received together with said second customer identifier and said deposit identifier;

a step for comparing said first customer identifier contained in said instruction with said first identifier stored in said storage device, and for rejecting said instruction if said two first customer identifiers are not substantially the same;

an accepting step for accepting said object or second information retrieval request containing therein said second customer identifier and said deposit identifier; and

a step for permitting the retrieval of said object or said second information in accordance with said request if said second customer identifier contained in said request substantially matches said second customer identifier contained in said instruction.

25. An object or information management method comprising:

a storing step for storing an object of two-dimensional or three-dimensional shape received from a first customer, or for storing second information received from a

first customer in a storage device, said second information being analog data or digital data;

a first storing step for storing in a storage device a first customer identifier for identifying said first customer and a deposit identifier for identifying said object or said second information;

an accepting step for accepting an instruction containing therein said first customer identifier, said deposit identifier, and a second customer identifier for identifying a customer other than said first customer, said instruction instructing to transfer a copy of said second information or a copy of first information generated from information contained in said object, to said customer having said second customer identifier;

a step for comparing said first customer identifier contained in said instruction with said first identifier stored in said storage device, and for rejecting said instruction if said two first customer identifiers are not substantially the same;

an accepting step for accepting a request containing therein said second customer identifier and said deposit identifier and requesting storage of the copy of said first information or said second information;

a step for permitting said customer having said second identifier at least to retrieve said first information or said second information for viewing if said second customer identifier contained in said request substantially matches said second customer identifier contained in said instruction; and

a step for charging said customer having said second identifier at least for the storage of said copy if

said second customer identifier contained in said request substantially matches said second customer identifier contained in said instruction.

26. An object or information management method according to claim 23, wherein

said object or said second information is associated with a customer having a third identifier, and

said first customer identifier is replaced by said third identifier.